THE SETTING

871 Children of all communities now go to school, and the old prejudice against admitting untouchable students is dying out. In recent years some Mala and Madiga boys joined the school, but most of them attended only in name, playing truant so consistently that they derived little benefit and eventually stopped going altogether. The school is ill-equipped, having some miserable-looking furniture, a few charts and maps and the inevitable blackboard. The master still wields his stick, and among other reasons this explains perhaps the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the lower-class children and their parents for the school.

743 The dispensary is housed in a small room and its adjoining
757 verandah. The rest of the building is used as living-quarters by the Medical Officer. This small dispensary was started by one of the Jagirdars, and has had a succession of Medical Officers who had no qualifications for the job. The present incumbent too is not properly qualified, for he is not even a medical licenciate. He is paid Rs. 45 per month and is supplied with a small quantity of drugs by the Medical Department of the Hyderabad Government.

[172] As a result of contact with the cities, the villagers have developed a great liking for injections, expecting them to work like magic and provide quick and certain cure for all ailments. The Medical Officer, although he is not authorized to give injections, does so in the course of his limited private practice. People go to the dispensary only for the treatment of common ailments, such as scabies, cough and malaria. For want of proper equipment and a qualified medical practitioner, the dispensary at Shamirpet has very few patients. In addition to the allopathic dispensary there are several elderly people in the village who administer herbal preparations according to Indian indigenous systems of medicine.

755 Magic and divination are also employed to a considerable extent by all sections of the people. 'Where herbs and medicines do not work, proper chants and spells do not fail us', the people often say. Indeed, for certain categories of disease and difficulties recourse
757 to divination is often regarded as the only proper remedy. It must be added that increased contact with the cities and the influence of education have greatly enhanced the value of modern medicine in the eyes of the people. There is now practically no prejudice against vaccination, although some people are still afraid of plague and cholera inoculations because they cause pain and fever. A minority of the villagers take advantage of the qualified doctors

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who practise in Secundrabad and Hyderabad, and a few even go to the well-equipped hospitals for prolonged treatment of difficult and persistent diseases. However, for the majority of the population the only medicines used for ordinary ailments are the inexpensive indigenous herbs and drugs which are locally available.

The local post office, under one of the village schoolmasters, serves Shamirpet and a large number of adjoining villages. The system of mail distribution in the countryside is very defective. Often the village postman takes a month or even more to reach a village on his periodic rounds. Letters are generally delivered personally to people who come to the post office for them, or they are handed to a co-villager who happens to visit the post office, for further transmission.

The police station at Shamirpet is in charge of a sub-inspector and has a strength of two head constables and twelve constables. This force is responsible for the maintenance of law and order in the villages under its jurisdiction. The police keep an eye on all doubtful characters, organize regular patrols of the villages and through the subordinate officials keep themselves informed of local developments. Their official records register all births and deaths, which must be reported by the inhabitants of the village.

As the tank is more than a mile from the village, the people use well water for domestic purposes. In respect of wells, Shamirpet has been very unlucky. Out of a total of thirty-three wells within the village limits, there are only three which yield good, drinkable water, the water of all other wells being brackish and unpalatable. Most people are therefore able to use sweet water only for drinking and cooking, whilst clothes and household utensils are washed in brackish water. The outlying wards of the Malas and Madigas are more fortunate in this respect, for their wells, situated at a distance of about half a mile from their respective colonies, yield 'sweet' water. In the summer months there is often an acute scarcity of drinking water in the village, and at this time large crowds of women gather at the few sweet-water wells waiting patiently to fill their many brass and earthen pots. This time of enforced waiting is spent in gossiping, in exchanging news and often in relating the latest scandals.

The sanitation of the village is the responsibility of the Yetti Madigas, whose traditional duty it is to sweep the street and lanes; in return for the service, the government grants them the use of certain rent-free lands. 27

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RITUAL STRUCTURE

5. RELIGION IN DISEASE AND DIFFICULTY

In the two preceding sections an attempt has been made to present the ritual cycle of the community covering firstly the festivals and ceremonies within a normal calendar year, and secondly, the rites and observances concerning the major crises of life. These cycles are rigidly observed, as their observance constitutes the *dharma* or the appropriate way of life, and leads to the prosperity and well-being of the family as well as to a desirable future for the individual after death. With the exception of these festivals, under normal conditions of life, there is very little spiritual or devotional activity in the community. But persistent difficulties, uncommon diseases, and frequent deaths turn the people's thoughts to supernatural factors; events are interpreted in terms of supernatural interferences, and are sought to be remedied by magico-religious procedures.

Most of the common diseases are interpreted as a 'fault in the physical system', and are treated with herbal medicines or modern drugs obtained from the dispensary. Common colds, headaches, fever, stomach-ache, scabies, gonorrhoea and syphilis are regarded as natural diseases, and an effort is made to cure them with medicines. But persistent headaches, intermittent fevers, continued stomach disorders, rickets and other wasting diseases among children, menstrual troubles, repeated abortions, etc., are attributed to supernatural forces. In all such cases medicinal cures as well as propitiation of the 'unseen powers' are attempted simultaneously. Similarly, such calamities as the failure of crops, total blindness, repeated failures in undertakings, deaths of children in quick succession and too many deaths in the family within a short time are taken to indicate 'misfortune' and 'the handiwork of malevolent supernatural forces'. Smallpox, cholera and plague are always attributed to the wrath of various goddesses. For these diseases worship is regarded as the only remedy; and no medicines are administered to the patients.

What are the major factors that cause these difficulties, distresses and deaths? In the village community they are attributed to one or more of the following:

(i) The wrath of ancestor-spirits.
(ii) Unfavourable stars.
(iii) Ghosts and spirits.
(iv) The wrath of gods.
(v) Black magic and witchcraft.

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THE CHANGING SCENE

Changes in tools and technical processes are also important. Barbers, carpenters, blacksmiths and goldsmiths are now using factory-made tools and instruments. The village tailor has a sewing machine. It is significant that there has been no mentionable change in agricultural tools. In farming methods, however, some changes have taken place. Improved seeds are being used by many cultivators. The value of green manure is realized by an increasing number of agriculturists. Oil cakes, castor, ammonium sulphate, and a special concoction of chemical fertilizers known as 'paddy mixture' are now being used. More attention is given to growing vegetables. A greater percentage of cultivators is now growing 'cash crops'.

Communications too have now improved. Many persons take advantage of the bus service. There are six private bicycles in the village. A shop-keeper has four more which can be hired. The headman of the village has recently bought a 1928 model Ford. The traditional bullock carts are still largely used for transportation of goods, and also for travel.

The opening of a small dispensary in the village, and the availability of excellent facilities of modern medical treatment in the city have considerably changed the attitude of the people towards diseases and their treatment. Although people still believe that smallpox and cholera are the result of the wrath of two goddesses and annually organize ceremonies in their honour on behalf of the village, the old fear of vaccination and inoculation has now practically disappeared. People no longer run away from the village on the appearance of the vaccinator, nor do they offer him bribes or threats for being spared the cruelty of vaccination. Divination, protective magic, chants and spells are all still employed to ward off disease and difficulty, but at the same time increasing use is being made of modern medicine. Age-old prescriptions of indigenous herbs are generally used for fevers and other common ailments. But when the disease takes a serious turn the patient may even be removed to a hospital in the city. Injections which were greatly feared a few decades ago are now eagerly sought as they are believed to give quick and sure relief from all ailments. Some people keep a limited stock of some of the popular and cheap patent medicines. Medicines for virility and strength prominently advertised in newspapers are obtained by post.

The social structure of the community is basically the same,

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178 advantages perceived, responsibilities recognized.'[1] Extending this approach to technical and organizational changes in peasant communities, we can attribute some changes in the life-ways of the people to State compulsion and legal prescription. In some spheres, particularly in material culture and technology, utility, convenience, availability and price determine to a great extent
178 the adoption of new elements and traits. The prestige factor too is
554 significant, for any externally induced or internally inspired change in the system of status evaluation brings in its wake significant modifications in the organization and life-ways of society. Innovation, variety and change for its own sake can also account for substantial variation from established norms in social behaviour at a given point of time. In a small rural community such as Shamirpet, which is situated near a big and modern city and is in everyday contact with it, the prevailing climate of opinion in social, economic and political matters in the city is bound to influence its general outlook and ways, for apart from their practical value city-ways are gradually coming to be regarded as more 'respectable' and 'progressive'.

178 So far State compulsion has been instrumental in bringing about
[151] little social and cultural change in the village community. Compulsory vaccination as well as inoculation at the time of an epidemic appear to be the only significant measures enforced by the State which have been accepted in the everyday life of the com-
[783] munity. Although untouchability has been abolished by law, in actual practice it only gives to the hitherto untouchables an equal share in public utilities, for considerations of pollution bar all effective interaction between the high and the low castes especially in the social spheres of inter-dining and inter-marriage. Symbolic as it is, this gesture of the State has nevertheless brought about a considerable modification in the inter-group attitudes between the clean and untouchable castes.

178 The factors of utility, convenience and availability have played
757 a more important role in bringing several new elements into the life of the community. Although indigenous herbs and magico-religious practices are still continued in the treatment of diseases, the efficacy and utility of allopathic drugs and injections have greatly changed the attitude of the people towards modern medicine. I have pointed out earlier that they eagerly seek these

[1] Raymond Firth, *Elements of Social Organization* (London, 1951), p. 85.

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medicines and injections. The old beliefs and practices survive, partly because of the non-availability of quick and efficient modern treatment, and partly also because of its prohibitive cost. Besides the two systems do not conflict, and in order to be doubly sure, most people continue magico-religious practices along with modern medicinal treatment. Adoption of several new tools and instruments for occupational work, as well as of several other items of Western technology, such as buses, railways, razors, and electric torches, introduced in the comparatively recent times is due to their efficiency and utility. In the matter of dress and ornament other factors must also be taken into account. Mill-made cloth was not regarded only as cheap and more durable; it came to be looked upon as more respectable also. The coarse handloom cloth was regarded as rustic, the finer mill-cloth, on the other hand, was more refined and dignified. Further, mill-made cloth allowed a wider range of choice in the matter of colours, designs and patterns. The style of dress was influenced by a variety of factors. Under Muslim rule the style of dress of the rulers became fashionable. With Congress in power there was a sudden switch from the Muslim court-dress to Congress-patronized national dress. Modern Indian—as well as Western-style clothes—cigarettes, sun-glasses and tea are not only popular because of their utility, they possess a great prestige value as well.

Influence of the city has brought about adjustment and modification in several spheres, but the need of balancing different extremes in the organization of the community has so far prevented any drastic structural change in village communities. Under the impact of the new socio-economic factors the family ties have weakened, the kin-group has lost some of its characteristic strength and in the system of status evaluation achieved-status is competing with traditionally ascribed status; but the society still continues to be caste-structured as caste plays a vital role in its social, economic and ritual organization. Democracy has brought in its wake party organization and elections which demand group formation and group allegiance: in several rural areas no new groups have emerged, the loyalties of the people have only been re-affirmed to the pre-existing caste groups. While no important social or economic projects and reforms have so far been put into operation, the first major political change—the